

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01435454 2

Bain, James
Canadian public documents

Z
1373
B3

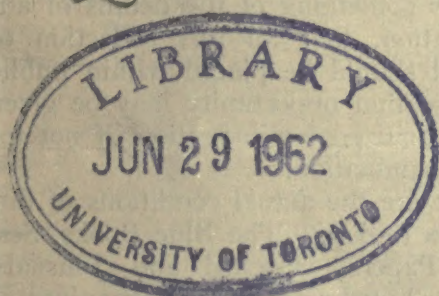
CANADIAN PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

A CRITICISM AND
A SUGGESTION

BY
JAMES BAIN, D.C.L.

LIBRARIAN TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Z
1373
B3



800033



TORONTO

Reprinted from "THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE" for June

1905

Canadian Public Documents*

By JAMES BAIN, *Librarian Toronto Public Library*



THE ordinary Blue Books, as they are called, are to most readers the dryest and most repulsive of printed matter. Books they are, but books full of statistical matter and formal letters, poorly printed and apparently of no interest to any save the political economist and the journalist. So says the "Man of the street," whose acquaintance with them rarely goes beyond the Auditor-General's report or the list of unclaimed balances in the banks. It is difficult to discover from the Government returns the actual cost of printing the public documents, but it appears to be in the neighbourhood of half a million dollars, an enormous sum to waste if these reports are of little value. What then do they consist of? The Blue Books laid before Parliament embrace, among other things, the reports of the great departments which carry out the wishes of the Canadian people as laid down by legislative enactment. They show what progress or retrogression has taken place in agriculture, manufactures, fisheries, mining, lumbering, banking, and insurance, and what steps have been taken for the improvement of the means of communication and for the protection and well-being of the people of the Dominion. In those printed in 1903 are to be found 68 separate documents, the largest of which occupies 2,770 pages. They cover the reports of the following departments: Auditor-General, Insurance, Trade and Commerce, Inland Revenue, Public Works, Railways and Canals, Marine and Fisheries, Postmaster-General, Interior, Geological Survey, Indian Affairs, North-West Mounted Police, Secretary of State, Public Printing and Stationery, Minister of Justice, Militia and Defence, Labour, Unclaimed Bank Balances, Public Accounts, Trade and Navigation, Criminal Statistics, Archives. In addition to the smaller special reports and returns are to be found the volumes of the Census,

and occasionally the detailed reports of the important Commissions, such as those on the Labour Question, Liquor Traffic, and Chinese Emigration.

At the end of each session these Blue Books are bound in a series of uniform volumes, each containing an alphabetical and numerical index to the series, including also the titles of all unprinted papers presented to Parliament. In 1903 the total number was 179, of which 111 were not printed, not being of general interest, but of which typewritten copies could no doubt be procured. There is also printed for Parliament the Journal of the House of Commons and the Senate, and the daily Hansard and Votes and Proceedings, of which copies collated and bound are supplied at the end of the session to the members.

In addition to these there are the separate publications of the departments such as the Statistical Year Book, the Reports, Monographs, and Maps of the Geological Survey, the Survey Department and Mining Bureau.

Now it is evident that in any country, and especially in one so democratic as Canada, where every person is expected to know something of the details of administration, that all this collection of material should be placed within public reach, so that opportunity may be given to every citizen for inspection, if not for closer examination.

What are the actual conditions of distribution to-day? The Blue Books, Sessional Papers, Hansard and Journals, are distributed under the instructions of the Printing Committee of the House in a more or less haphazard fashion, which usually results in the neglect of the proper repositories, and in accumulations in places where they are comparatively useless. A request from a member that he would like to have them sent to any small library or private individual has always been granted as a matter of form.

* Read before the Ontario Library Association, April, 1905

No restrictions apparently have been placed on the free distribution of the Blue Books, which seems quite right and proper. The regular list of copies to members, newspapers and officials, is freely added to while the edition lasts. In the case of small libraries, without proper accommodations, the Blue Books were received because the Board felt complimented by the thoughtfulness of their member, who on his part was glad to have found something which cost him nothing, and yet showed his desire to look after the interests of his constituents. At the same time the unexpressed feeling was that they were a nuisance. Nobody looked at them, they accumulated so quickly as to be in the way, and in many cases the wrappers were never torn off at the time when they were being carted away to be deposited in the cellar.

Even the larger libraries which received the papers regularly from the House or from members, found that they required so much shelf room which was necessary for new novels that they gave them the cold shoulder, and bundled them into out-of-the-way corners.

This has arisen largely from ignorance of their contents and form of publication. Last year the Printing Committee of the House seems to have some inkling of this, and peremptorily shut down on the supply of any parliamentary papers to public libraries. This was an extraordinary step. Because the Government publications were not read by everyone, therefore nobody should read them.

As an illustration of its folly, take the case of the Toronto Public Library, with which I am more familiar. This Library has, at considerable expense and trouble, completed its sets of Government publications from 1792 to 1903, both Provincial and Federal. I have no statistics of their use in the Library for any one year, but it can be readily understood that in a city where literature and politics command so much attention, that the number of inquiries for them is very considerable every month. These sets are free to every applicant; indices are provided, when unbound the volumes are bound at the expense of the Library, and everything done to make them of permanent value. One

would naturally think that the official authorities would be anxious to assist in extending the advantages of this collection by seeing that it was kept up-to-date; but the contrary is the case. Last year everything was stopped and the Library was indebted to a friend for the Blue Books of the session.

The Librarian has asked for the Sessional Papers and Journals for 1904, and their regular continuance, but so far has received no answer. The Blue Books are, however, coming on along with the daily Hansard. But the Blue Books are useless for shelf purposes, and if the debates are placed on fyle in the reading-room, they speedily become unfit for binding at the end of the session. A second copy, collated ready for binding, was asked for with the same result.

The Library was indebted for some years to a private individual for a paper-covered copy of the Statistical Year Book. When application was made to the head of the Department which issues it, asking that it might be sent regularly on publication, a reply was received that a copy would be sent on application, but they would not send it regularly. As it was sometimes several months before tidings of its publication was received, and as, when it did arrive, a month was required to bind it, you can readily understand that in the Toronto Public Library we require to look elsewhere for Canadian statistical information than to Ottawa.

Our sets of the Debates of the House of Commons and Senate are complete, thanks to the members of the House, but no librarian should be required to beg what surely is public property; and while it is true that a published price of \$4 has been fixed by the King's Printer for the Sessional Hansard, it is equally unjust to tax public libraries for public property. I might enlarge upon other difficulties to show how completely the present system or non-system has failed. Now it is useless calling attention to a grievance without pointing out how an improvement can be made. There are at least two ways in existence worth considering.

First,—The Imperial method, by which all documents printed for the government

are sold by the King's Printer at the bare cost of paper, so that reports may be obtained for a few pence.

Second,—The United States' system, which provides for the distribution of all public documents to officially appointed depositories. As the Canadian people have grown accustomed to the free distribution of government reports, the United States system seems best fitted to meet the requirements of the case, recognising, as it does, the value of the documents, the public right to have free and easy access to them, and the necessity for providing proper accommodation for their security and use. It is proposed, therefore, that in place of the irregular method now in use in distributing parliamentary papers, that the following be adopted and that the government be requested to put it in force:—

1st. (a) That the government shall select a limited number of public libraries (say 50) throughout the Dominion, to be called first-class depositories, to whom shall be supplied every printed document or map printed by authority of Parliament or of the departments, conditional on the library undertaking to provide the proper accommodation and permit free use of them.

(b) The Hansard to be supplied daily

and also a copy bound in cloth at the end of each session.

(c) The Year Book to be supplied in cloth.

(d) The King's Printer to be authorised to print the number required of all publications and maps (say 50) over and above the number ordered by Parliament or by the Departments and distribute them to each first-class depository.

2nd. That in like manner, smaller public libraries throughout the Dominion shall be chosen as second-class depositories to whom shall be sent, on their making application, the Blue Books in paper, and the Statistical Record, bound.

In this way a library of Canadian documents would be established in every centre of the Dominion, in which every person might have confidence that he could obtain the fullest official information.

I have not spoken of the official publications of the Provinces, because they are comparatively few in number and have been distributed generously; but if the Federal Government were to establish these first-class depositories, I have no doubt all the Provinces would gladly contribute the required number of their documents, once they were assured of their being properly taken care of and freely used.



Z
1373
B3

Bain, James
Canadian public documents

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY
